

What is claimed is:

1. A method of determining information for accessing an electronic mail account according to an electronic mail protocol, comprising:
 - receiving an address for delivering electronic mail to an electronic mail account;
 - receiving a password for accessing the electronic mail account;
 - extracting, from the address, a user name and an electronic mail account domain for the electronic mail account; and
 - determining whether the electronic mail account domain, user name and password can be used to access the electronic mail account according to the electronic mail protocol.
2. The method recited in claim 1, wherein the step of determining whether the electronic mail account domain, user name and password can be used to access the electronic mail account according to the electronic mail protocol includes determining if the electronic mail account domain is included in a list of closed domains that do not include server computers employing the electronic mail protocol.
3. The method recited in claim 2, wherein, if the electronic mail account domain is not included in the list of closed domains, further including:
 - accessing a list of known domains, such that at least one server computer known to employ the electronic mail protocol is associated with each of the known domains;
 - mapping the electronic mail account domain against the list of known domains; and
 - if the electronic mail account domain is included in the list of known domains, attempting to access the electronic mail account at one or more of the server computers associated with the electronic mail account domain using the user name and address.
4. The method recited in claim 3, wherein,
 - if only one computer server employing the electronic mail protocol is associated with the electronic mail account domain and the electronic mail account cannot be accessed through the one computer server, then

prompting a user to resubmit the user name and password for the electronic mail account, and

attempting to access the electronic mail account at the one computer server according to the electronic mail protocol by using the resubmitted user name and password.

5. The method recited in claim 4, wherein the user is prompted to resubmit the user name by resubmitting the address for delivering electronic mail to the electronic mail account.

6. The method recited in claim 4, wherein, if the electronic mail account cannot be accessed at the one computer server according to the electronic mail protocol by using the resubmitted user name and password, further including:

concatenating a server name prefix with the electronic mail account domain to form a default name for a server computer; and

attempting to access the electronic mail account according to the electronic mail protocol by using the default name, the user name and the password.

7. The method recited in claim 6, wherein the server name prefix is selected from the group consisting of: "mail.", "pop.", and "pop3.".

8. The method recited in claim 6, wherein, if the electronic mail account cannot be accessed according to the electronic mail protocol by using the default server name, the user name and the password, further including the step of prompting a user to provide a server name for accessing the electronic mail account.

9. The method recited in claim 5, wherein, if the electronic mail account domain is not included in the list of known domains, further including

concatenating a server name prefix with the electronic mail account domain to form a default name for a server computer; and

attempting to access the electronic mail account according to the electronic mail protocol by using the default name, the user name and the password.

10. The method recited in claim 9, wherein the server name prefix is selected from the group consisting of: "mail.", "pop.", and "pop3.".

11. The method recited in claim 9, wherein, if the electronic mail account cannot be accessed according to the electronic mail protocol by using the default server name, the user name and the password, further including the step of prompting a user to provide a server name for accessing the electronic mail account.

12. The method recited in claim 1, wherein the step of determining whether the electronic mail account domain, user name and password can be used to access the electronic mail account according to the electronic mail protocol includes:

accessing a list of known domains, such that at least one server computer known to employ the electronic mail protocol is associated with each of the known domains;
mapping the electronic mail account domain against the list of known domains; and
if the electronic mail account domain is included in the list of known domains, attempting to access the electronic mail account at one or more of the server computers associated with the electronic mail account domain using the user name and address.

13. The method recited in claim 12, wherein,
if only one computer server employing the electronic mail protocol is associated with the electronic mail account domain and the electronic mail account cannot be accessed through the one computer server, then

prompting a user to resubmit the user name and password for the electronic mail account, and

attempting to access the electronic mail account at the one computer server according to the electronic mail protocol by using the resubmitted user name and password.

14. The method recited in claim 13, wherein the user is prompted to resubmit the user name by resubmitting the address for delivering electronic mail to the electronic mail account.

15. The method recited in claim 13, wherein, if the electronic mail account cannot be accessed at the one computer server according to the electronic mail protocol by using the resubmitted user name and password, further including:

concatenating a server name prefix with the electronic mail account domain to form a default name for a server computer; and

attempting to access the electronic mail account according to the electronic mail protocol by using the default name, the user name and the password.

16. The method recited in claim 15, wherein the server name prefix is selected from the group consisting of: "mail.", "pop.", and "pop3."..

17. The method recited in claim 15, wherein, if the electronic mail account cannot be accessed according to the electronic mail protocol by using the default server name, the user name and the password, further including the step of prompting a user to provide a server name for accessing the electronic mail account.

18. The method recited in claim 12, wherein, if the electronic mail account domain is not included in the list of known domains, further including:

concatenating a server name prefix with the electronic mail account domain to form a default name for a server computer; and

attempting to access the electronic mail account according to the electronic mail protocol by using the default name, the user name and the password.

19. The method recited in claim 18, wherein the server name prefix is selected from the group consisting of: "mail.", "pop.", and "pop3."..

20. The method recited in claim 18, wherein, if the electronic mail account cannot be accessed according to the electronic mail protocol by using the default server name, the user name and the password, further including the step of prompting a user to provide a server name for accessing the electronic mail account.

21. The method recited in claim 1, wherein the step of determining whether the electronic mail account domain, user name and password can be used to access the electronic mail account according to the electronic mail protocol includes:

concatenating a server name prefix with the electronic mail account domain to form a default name for a server computer; and

attempting to access the electronic mail account according to the electronic mail protocol by using the default name, the user name and the password.

22. The method recited in claim 21, wherein the server name prefix is selected from the group consisting of: "mail.", "pop.", and "pop3.".

23. The method recited in claim 21, wherein, if the electronic mail account cannot be accessed using the default server name, the user name and the address, further including prompting a user to provide a server name for accessing the electronic mail account.

24. The method recited in claim 1, wherein the electronic mail protocol is selected from the group consisting of: the post office protocol, the Internet message access protocol, the Microsoft Exchange electronic mail protocol, and the Lotus Notes electronic mail protocol.

25. The method recited in claim 1, wherein the address and password are received from a user of the electronic mail account.

26. The method recited in claim 1, wherein the address and password are received from an electronic mail messaging software application.

27. A device for determining information needed to access an electronic mail account according to an electronic mail protocol, comprising:

an address decomposer for decomposing an address for accessing an electronic mail account into a user name for the electronic mail account and a domain for the electronic mail account;

a server mapper for comparing the domain with a list of domains stored in a database; and

a real time query unit for attempting to access the electronic mail account according to the electronic mail account using the user name and the domain extracted from the address.

28. The device recited in claim 27, wherein the server mapper compares the domain with a list of closed domains that do not include server computers employing the electronic mail protocol.

29. The device recited in claim 28, wherein the server mapper also compares the domain with a list of known domains, such that at least one server computer known to employ the electronic mail protocol is associated with each of the known domains.

30. The device recited in claim 27, wherein the server mapper compares the domain with a list of known domains, such that at least one server computer known to employ the electronic mail protocol is associated with each of the known domains.

31. The device recited in claim 27, further including:

a host name generator for concatenating a server name prefix with the electronic mail account domain to form a default name for a server computer.

32. The device recited in claim 27, further including:

the database storing the list of domains.

34. The device recited in claim 33, wherein the database further stores a list of known domains, such that at least one server computer known to employ the electronic mail protocol is associated with each of the known domains.

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